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ABSTRACT

Policy catalysts such as welfare reform or research findings on the impact of day care provide new opportunities to frame the discussion surrounding early childhood education. This group of working papers examines effective language for discussing communication strategies for advocacy. The first paper, "Early Childhood Education and the Framing Wars" (Susan Bales), introduces the remaining papers, and maintains that children's advocates must be prepared to "do battle with" the dominant frames of news coverage and to reframe the coverage of child education and care to advance its identification as a public issue. The second paper, "Why Early Ed Benefits All of Us" (George Lakoff and Joseph Grady), identifies, explores, and explains various forms of childhood education. This paper also explains the dominant metaphorical streams associated with the issue, notes the pros and cons of these options, and suggests the best ways to reframe the issue to support progressive reform. The third paper, "Public Attitudes about Early Childhood Care and Education" (Richard Brandon), summarizes public support for early childhood education as reported in several survey and focus group studies, focusing on financial assistance, the importance of quality care, and the personal salience of early childhood education issues. The fourth paper, "Communication Strategies for Advocates of Early Childhood Education" (Full Circle Associates), reports the results of a focus group study to test African- and European-Americans' reactions to a series of metaphors, frameworks, and labels for early education for children from birth to age 6, focusing on parental roles and responsibility, quality and importance of early childhood education, quality assurance and terminology. (KB)

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EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE FOR DISCUSSING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND POLICY

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Benton Foundation
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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND THE FRAMING WARS

With every passing day, a new opportunity arises to frame the discussion surrounding early childhood education. Whether it's the closely watched transition from welfare to work, the release of a new study of the impact of day care on children's behavior, the description of a child left unattended in an unsafe center, or the release of new KidsCount data, the issue does not have to fight the usual uphill battle for public attention that plagues so many children's issues. Child care is front and center in the media today, that "arena in which symbolic contests take place."[1] But the volume of news clips is not sufficient to prioritize an issue as ripe for public solution. The frame of coverage is a critical factor in determining whether any issue warrants our attention as citizens or as consumers, whether we must solve it in the public arena of government or in the private arena of parents, and whom we hold accountable for failures.

Welcome to what media activist and scholar Charlotte Ryan dubbed "the framing wars." The frame, simply defined, is "how pieces of information are selected and organized to produce stories that make sense to their writers and audiences."[2] As scholars have shown in numerous studies over the past decade,[3] the frame has enormous power to change the very nature of the story and its interpretation by the audience. "Every frame holds within it the notion of who made the problem and who gets to fix it."[4] It is for this reason that "gaining attention alone is not what a social movement wants; the real battle is over whose interpretation, whose framing of reality, gets the floor."[5]

When children's advocates approach child care, they must come prepared to do battle with the dominant frame of news coverage and to reframe it in such a way as to open the door to new interpretations and solutions, especially those that advance its identification as a public issue. To this end, a number of interested groups have begun to probe public opinion with qualitative and quantitative studies, identifying the major roadblocks to a discussion of the policy objectives children's advocates wish to propose. Those studies yield important information, from the public's concern with safety to child care's clear identity as a work facilitator.

Yet children's advocates must resist the temptation to use the dominant news frames to achieve access to more coverage. To repeat the personalized frame in order to make more news that further alienates the public from policy solutions is the media equivalent of friendly fire.

"When children's advocates approach child care, they must come prepared to do battle with the dominant frames of news coverage."

Rather, these studies should be viewed as the mirror image of a learned approach, mediated by the media. It should not surprise us to find that the public frames day care issues in terms of work and safety, when the coverage of the issue has been largely tied to stories of welfare reform or killer nannies. In the absence of a recent content analysis of coverage of this very issue, one can only speculate about the nature of child care news

[1] William A. Gamson, Foreward to Charlotte Ryan's *Prime Time Activism*, Boston: South End Press, 1991.

[2] Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism*, Boston: South End Press, 1991, p.53.

[3] See Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; and Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

[4] Ryan, 1991.

[5] Ryan, 1991.

coverage; but one doesn't have to go very far out on a limb to assert that the Louise Woodward trial probably produced more coverage of child care-related issues than all the other news angles combined. What we are up against in a new round of framing wars is a legacy of this and other coverage that sets up a "kids at risk," child abuse, bad parent constellation of issues that has the effect of emphasizing safety over development and parental responsibility over government regulation. The safety frame, I suspect, is repeated and reinforced in local news every day, as the focus of child care coverage is on unlicensed centers and the consequences: kids left unattended, kids who wander into traffic, kids abused. In addition, just over our shoulders lurks the McMartin Preschool, another tsunami of media coverage of child care issues. Despite advocates' recent laudable attempts to insert a new theme—brain research and cognitive development—into the discussion, this new reframing will require additional and sustained media power if it is to erode or erase the daily dose of dominant frames: work and safety.

"The current frames reinforce personal, not collective, responsibility."

The work frame is what we see in the welfare-related coverage. Child care providers are "workers," not "teachers." They provide "care," not "education" or "learning." They exist so that mothers can work, not so that children can learn or develop. Those who take the media literally must puzzle anew as to why these stories do not create a vast hue and cry for government regulation, on the one hand, and public/private investment on the other. The reason, media scholars would reply, is because the current frames reinforce personal, not collective, responsibility.

The safety frame puts the responsibility back on the parents to choose wisely between day care centers; the media often offers tips for parents to help them discern what constitutes good care—as if good care were plentiful and affordable, and educated consumerism the key variable. The work frame asserts that the collective nature of the problem has indeed been solved through welfare reform; it is now the responsibility of each working woman to find the day care necessary to support her re-entry into the workforce. Advocates who fail to recognize the responsibility cues inherent in media frames will always be surprised by the public backlash that identifies the parent as the irresponsible party and holds the mother responsible for inadequate child care.

These frames do not exist in isolation from other children's issues, of course, and the focus group report published here echoes the deeply held "blame the parent" attitudes so convincingly documented by the Public Agenda Foundation in their report, *Kids These Days*.[6]

Understanding what we are up against as children's advocates is one thing. Finding new frames that help us out of the rut is another. It was with full recognition of the difficulty of this particular reframing challenge that the Benton Foundation and the Human Services Policy Center at the University of Washington sought to identify for our colleagues a different set of conceptual frames and metaphors that might guide our interaction with the media in the future.

To do this, we went to the field of cognitive linguistics and asked scholars George Lakoff and Joseph Grady to identify, explore, and explain the various options available to children's advocates in furthering public understanding of the importance of investing in early childhood education, to explain the dominant metaphorical streams associated with the issue, to suggest the pros and cons of these options, and to suggest the best ways to reframe the issue to support progressive reform.

Both Richard Brandon and I bring to this discussion our own unique perspectives as policy advocates and communications practitioners. Brandon's familiarity with child care

[6] Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda, 1997.

issues dictated that we drive the debate toward issues of quality and child development. His sensitivity to the fear of displacement by parents also guided our authors. My own instructions included a clear direction toward collective responsibility and away from frames that reinforce the safety/work status quo. We shared the conviction that the "child storage" frame that makes parents the focus of day care and child care stories would continue to serve as a "frame clash" with our interest in quality child development. We came together to explore the alternatives.

For some years now, the Benton Foundation has worked with scholars in various fields to study the effects of different media frames on children's issues and explore ways to move beyond these punitive and narrow frames. This work began with the historic Institute on Social Problems, which Benton hosted at Brandeis University in 1995, in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and the Berkeley Media Studies Group. "Effective Language for Discussing Early Childhood Education and Policy" is squarely in this tradition of bridging the distance between scholars and advocates to advance public understanding of, and support for, children's issues.

The field of cognitive linguistics, and George Lakoff's work in particular, afforded us some attractive alternatives to the personalistic frame. Lakoff has suggested in his recent book, *Moral Politics*,[7] that certain connections between the personal and the political are wired into our human circuitry. "The mechanism by which idealized family models apply to public policy is metaphor," Lakoff and Grady write, "in this case, the metaphor that The Nation Is A Family, with the Government As Parent and Citizens As Children." Thus, when we talk about the roles of children and caring adults with sensitivity to the world view we are conjuring, the authors argue, we are at the same time building a foundation for progressive public policies.

We were fortunate in this project to have the added benefit of access to recent focus groups conducted by Celinda Lake and others, as well as the Roper Center for Public Opinion archives that, together, allowed us to put the Lakoff/Grady suggestions in a broader context. Finally, upon receipt of their paper, we were able to invest in two focus groups and several national survey questions that provide further context, contest, and confirmation of their suggestions. Nancy White's provocative analysis of the Benton/Human Services Policy Center focus groups follows, as does Richard Brandon's excellent paper on making sense of this work in the broader context of other research.

What we hope to have delivered to our colleagues in the field of child advocacy is a body of work from which we can all pick and choose new ideas, new soundbites, new frames, and new language, helping us bridge from the old coverage to new frames that advance policy solutions for children. Far from being a definitive, one-answer-fits-all-situations solution, the Lakoff/Grady paper offers a palette of responses for the child advocate to experiment with and match to each particular media and political environment.

For example, the simple change in terminology, from "day care" and "child care" to "early childhood education" or "early learning," promises a significant yield in overcoming the hurdles of public acceptance. At a time when concern for education is rapidly eclipsing crime as the most important problem facing the country in the public's estimation, Lakoff and Grady wisely urge advocates to reposition their campaign for quality child care to draw from this energy and extend the concern for inadequate educational outcomes down further into the roots of early learning. Thus, early ed becomes a solution to a problem already identified by the public.

"Simple changes in terminology...promise a significant yield in overcoming the hurdles of public acceptance."

This does not mean that advocates need to correct every anchor or story that repeats the old child storage and day care frames. It does, however, mean that bridging to the new language is imperative. In the section entitled "Answering Basic Questions About

[7] George Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Early Ed," Lakoff and Grady offer a rich array of soundbites that can be used by any advocate to bridge-away from day care toward early learning.

They also offer ways to avoid the parent-versus-provider confrontation so dear to media coverage. "A trained early ed provider isn't a substitute for a mother, but may know some things that many mothers don't—for instance, what kinds of explanations a two-year-old child can or can't understand." This kind of response enlists parents as partners without shifting the responsibility back on their shoulders exclusively.

Similarly, the shaping metaphor ("as the twig is bent, so grows the tree"), the nutrition metaphor ("the better the mind is nourished, the better it develops"), and the cultivation metaphor ("young children are like plants at their tenderest and most critical stage") all offer advocates simple homilies for reaching past ideology and earned media frames toward basic tenets that support more progressive ends. This new language sets the stage for the intervention of government, as it connects to water safety and food and drug standards—all widely held public positions. These turns of phrase should drive the outlines of speeches and op/eds around the country as we release the next round of early education reports.

This is the very essence of reframing. "One seldom encounters a news account that explicitly presents the core argument of the frame," explains Charlotte Ryan. "More commonly, an image or set of images—metaphors, catch-phrases, and/or anecdotes—carry the frame."[8] Children's advocates, intent on "proving" that children are in trouble or that certain programs work, must balance their insistence on the facts with the symbols that drive home those facts. They can accomplish this by attaching the facts to the metaphors that convey meaning.

The authors rightly admonish advocates against the simple push for regulations and suggest ways to introduce the need for standards and accreditation. Indeed, the inherent analogy between early ed and higher ed accomplishes some of this objective.

Nancy White notes an interesting incongruity in her paper summarizing the two recent focus groups. While the groups professed to understand a child's cognitive and social development needs and the importance of quality care, she comments that "it was interesting that, after both sessions, members of the groups approached the facilitator and expressed that they had 'learned a lot tonight' and suggested that it might be good if people had the chance to come together and discuss issues as a community or neighborhood. This might be an opportunity for future community mobilization efforts."

Richard Brandon highlights another finding from the *Great Expectations* survey published by the Coalition for America's Children[9] that "teachers in your community" are the top trusted source for accurate information about children's issues.

Put these two ideas together and you have a blueprint for creating a parent education program that supports early education. Advocates would be well-advised to consider an outreach effort that begins the reframing process using teachers to explain the new scientific research that documents the lasting importance of early learning. This promises to provide the kind of "proof" of impact that Nancy White's groups wanted as a precondition for their public investment.

It is important to note the dissonance between Americans' professed understanding of child-rearing and actual practice. In a recent review of changes in American values, the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research showed only a very small decline in the percentage of Americans who approve of spanking over the last 50 years—with 67 percent

"Children's advocates...must balance... the facts with symbols that drive home those facts.

[8] *The Public Perspective: A Roper Center Review of Public Opinion and Polling*, Volume 9, Number 2, February/March 1998, pg.14 & 21.

[9] *Great Expectations: How American Voters View Children's Issues*, Lake Research, Inc./The Tarrance Group, 1997.

approving in 1997, compared to 76 percent in 1946; fully 20 percent of Americans feel that spanking is right for all Americans, compared to only 4 percent who feel swearing or using offensive language and 11 percent who feel abortion in the first three months of pregnancy are acceptable choices.[10]

A literal assault on child-rearing practices promises to do little to reverse these trends if, as our focus groups suggest, they endure despite the public's assurances that they understand child development. A re-education that these practices from a different direction, using the language Lakoff and Grady suggest, holds greater promise.

Not all of Lakoff and Grady's recommendations played well in the focus groups. Their suggestion that we discuss early ed as building the moral and social foundations of the child appeared to backfire, sending participants scurrying back to their conviction that parents are not providing the moral guidance necessary to nurture their own children. The moral trigger seems so embedded in the public conscience that this attempt to reframe only served to set the participants off in the wrong direction.

It is this kind of thoughtful, experimental sorting through the suggestions which we hope to have facilitated through the collection of this new research. While not every suggestion may prove valid in application to a specific context, at least we have more possibilities at our disposal than the old child storage, work, and safety constructs.

In her poem, "Picking and Choosing," Marianne Moore discusses the confusion over wrong meanings—misinterpretations of events that send critics and explorers off in the wrong direction. And she admonishes us to find enough of a trail to set us straight. "Only rudimentary behavior is necessary to put us on the scent. 'A right good salvo of barks,' a few strong wrinkles puckering the skin between the ears, is all we ask." We hope that the metaphorical trails blazed by Lakoff and Grady serve this function for the symbolic contests that child advocates must wage to win new ground for early childhood education.

Susan Nall Bales
Director of Children's Programs
Benton Foundation
Summer 1998

[10]Ryan, 1991.

WHY EARLY ED BENEFITS ALL OF US

By George Lakoff Ph.D. and Joseph Grady Ph.D.

WHY EARLY EDUCATION IS NECESSARY

What Kids Learn Early and Why

Recent decades have witnessed an explosion of research into the basic mechanisms of learning, including the neural structures that allows us to perceive the world around us, remember experiences, learn skills, feel emotions, establish and maintain social relations, and make decisions. One of the most remarkable discoveries is that a child's brain is shaped in major ways during the first three to five years of life. The main mechanisms are the establishment of neural connections and the death of both connections between neurons and neurons themselves.

The question is: which connections will be established and strengthened and which will die? Unused neural connections tend to die. Without activity of the right kind, important potential connections between neurons are not established. In short, the basic wiring of the brain is accomplished during the earliest years, and the kinds of interactions children have during those years affect them for life. A lot of learning takes place after age five, but the brain structure in which that learning takes place is set to a remarkable degree within the first five years.

What is learned early is, to a large extent, learned permanently (including the desire and capacity for learning itself). Here are some of the things that develop early:

- Patterns of interpersonal and moral development.
- Prosocial and antisocial behavior.
- Empathy, self-confidence, and a sense of responsibility for oneself and for others.

Many things are learned better if acquired early, and some things are forbiddingly hard or impossible if learned too late (say, after age six or seven), including:

- ***Reading.*** Reading is learned more easily and effectively during the early years.
- ***Basic math.*** Young children can learn the rudiments of math early and can become comfortable with mathematical thinking at an early age.
- ***Music.*** If you have no exposure to music by age five, it is unlikely that you will be able to be a musician.
- ***Fine motor coordination.*** The motor skills needed to be an athlete, a dancer, and a skilled craftsman must be developed early.
- ***Languages.*** Any language learned very early in a natural setting by active participation is learned readily and in the same part of the brain as one's native language. Languages learned later in life are stored in a different part of the brain and fluency is much harder to acquire.
- ***Reasoning skills.*** Kids raised in an environment where questioning and reasoning are a valued part of everyday life grow up with an important advantage in these critical skills.

The kind of "learning" that takes place during the early years is natural learning, not classroom learning, and much of it is done through unconscious processes. Just as cognitive science has shown that most of our thought is below the level of consciousness, so most of our early learning is largely unconscious and relatively effortless.

"Even well-meaning and well-educated parents with plenty of time to devote to parenting may need to know a lot more about how to raise their children to realize their full potential."

The quality of care children receive matters greatly. Parents and other caregivers who were themselves deprived as children may not know the best way to provide a healthy and nurturing environment for children. Even well-meaning and well-educated parents with plenty of time to devote to parenting may need to know more about how to best raise their children to realize their full potential. All parents and caregivers can benefit by learning more about how children learn and develop. That knowledge is not yet part of the "common sense" of our culture, or any culture. Parents and caregivers do not need to know about the details of brain research, but they do need to know about what to do at what stage of childhood in order to help children develop as fruitfully as possible.

BACKGROUND: COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Framing and Metaphorical Thought

One of the most basic results in cognitive linguistics is that people understand almost everything by applying conceptual frames. The conclusion one draws depends on the frame one uses. For example, the same behavior can be described as either "thrifty" or "stingy," depending on whether that behavior (not spending much money) is framed in terms of efficient management of resources or willingness to share.

Similarly, having someone else care for your child during the day can be framed as (1) selfishly abdicating your parental responsibility, (2) doing what is necessary to earn a living, or (3) giving your child the benefits of an enriching environment. The use of language is crucial in determining which frame is evoked. Advocates for early childhood education need to be aware of exactly which language will evoke which frames.

Another basic result in cognitive linguistics is that people reason metaphorically most of the time without being aware of it. For example, love relationships are commonly thought of as being either business partnerships or two complementary parts fitting together to make a unified whole. Whether something is going wrong with the relationship can depend on the metaphor used to conceptualize it. The partnership metaphor entails that both people should be sharing both the work and the benefits of the relationship equally. This entailment doesn't make sense in the complementary parts metaphor, where it is assumed that each person brings different things to the relationship and gets different things out of it.

Metaphoric framing is also very relevant to the issue of early childhood education. For instance, if children are viewed as precious objects of a fixed nature, then simply storing them safely is a reasonable goal for a day care center. On the other hand, if children are seen as being malleable objects—as having their minds crucially shaped in a permanent way by their earliest experiences—then the requirements for day care are much more than mere storage.

For these reasons, it is vital that advocates be aware of the metaphors they use and the consequences of those metaphors.

"People understand almost everything by applying conceptual frames."

Family Values and Public Policy

An important finding in applying cognitive science to public policy is that family-based moral values are central to the framing of virtually all public policy issues. George Lakoff's book *Moral Politics* shows that the fundamental split between political conservatives and progressives/liberals mirrors a difference in core beliefs about idealized family life.

Conservatives tend to assume that a "Strict Father" model of the family is ideal. The strict father:

- Bears principal responsibility for supporting and protecting the family, as opposed to the mother who is child-rearer and homemaker.
- Is the moral authority who teaches his children right from wrong, establishes rules, and enforces them with "tough love."
- Instills discipline and doesn't coddle his children.
- Teaches the value of self-reliance.
- Doesn't meddle in the lives of his grown children.

Progressives/liberals, on the other hand, tend to see a "Nurturant Parent" family as ideal. The nurturant parent:

- Shares parental responsibility equally.
- Has empathy and care as primary moral values.
- Teaches responsibility for both self and others.
- Encourages questioning and dialog, rather than just obedience.
- Teaches the importance of social ties, cooperation, and interdependence.
- Seeks to maintain a caring parental relationship throughout life with grown children.

Conservatives often mistakenly see the nurturant parent as a "permissive" parent who fails to instill sufficient discipline and a sense of self-reliance in children. Their mistake is that nurturant parents instill a sense of responsibility for self and others and the inherent discipline to act responsibly. Progressives/liberals often see strict fathers as necessarily abusive, which they needn't be.

These differences have mattered crucially in shaping attitudes on major issues of public policy. Consider welfare. Conservatives have seen welfare in itself (regardless of the success or failure of any particular program) as immoral and harmful to the people it is supposed to help on the grounds that it destroys their self-discipline and sense of self-reliance—a form of coddling. Progressives/liberals have viewed welfare from the perspective of empathy, care, and the responsibility for others.

The mechanism by which idealized family models apply to public policy is metaphor (in this case the metaphor that The Nation Is A Family, with the Government As Parent and Citizens As Children). To conservatives, this means that government should not meddle in the lives of its mature citizens (the ones who can take care of themselves) and should promote the values of self-discipline and self-reliance in citizens who cannot take care of themselves (for example, those who are poor, uneducated, disabled, and discriminated against). To progressives/liberals, this means that the government has a responsibility to ensure the basic well-being of all its citizens—both those who can benefit from help in assuming their responsibilities, and those who absolutely need care.

This difference in family-based moral perspective applies in important ways to issues of early childhood education. For example, conservatives tend to feel that:

- Mothers should keep their traditional role as child-rearers and homemakers, not wage- earners, and that the government should do nothing to encourage mothers to leave the home.
- Responsible parents, being self-reliant, should not rely on the government or any assistance in raising their children.

- Others (for example, child care providers) may not instill the correct values and discipline in their children.
- Government credentialing of child care providers is a form of meddling.
- It is immoral to be forced to pay taxes for the support of other people's children.

The objections are a consequence of the way that Strict Father morality frames the issues of child care, and advocates for early education (early ed) will encounter these objections. It is important to understand that they come from a particular moral world view, rather than from ignorance or lack of concern. Such objections cannot be countered merely by facts or rational argument, since no facts or rational argument will change that moral world view. Indeed, virtually any facts presented will be reinterpreted to fit that world view.

When debating in public against someone with such views, advocates must be careful not to accept the other view. The point is to frame early ed within a pro-early education world view. In many cases, this can be accomplished by finding common ground between the views, since there are interests shared by conservatives and liberals/progressives that relate to early ed. Attempting to respond with facts and rational arguments without reframing, however, will tend to reinforce the opposing world view. Facts and rational arguments should be used, but only after reframing or highlighting shared frames.

The Basis for a Pro-Early-Education Consensus

There are two main facts that should be the basis for building a pro-early-ed consensus across the public as a whole. (This does not count that minority of the population who come to the issue with a strong moral ideology opposed to early ed.)

Fact 1: The Early Development Issue: A child's intellectual, emotional, social, and moral development is massively shaped by experiences and education between birth and age six.
Fact 2: The Need For Care Issue: For economic reasons, a very large number of mothers have to work and require affordable, high-quality child care.

Fact 2 is already widely acknowledged and is much better understood than Fact 1. But Fact 1 is what distinguishes early ed from mere day care (or "child storage") and early childhood educators from babysitters. It is important not to give in to the temptation to mention only Fact 2 in advocacy situations. The public MUST be educated about Fact 1. If the public comes to understand and acknowledge Fact 1, then there can be real positive change on behalf of children—a change that could be felt throughout the population within 20 years.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF FRAMING AND METAPHOR

Day Care vs. Early Ed

Don't refer to "day care." Do refer to "early ed(ucation)."

The term "day care" for most people elicits the "child storage" frame, in which a mother who wants a career needs a safe, convenient, and affordable place to leave her child for the day.

Replace the Day Care frame with an Early Ed frame, which focuses on:

"The term 'day care' for most people elicits the child storage frame."

- The needs of the child.
- The fact that this is the age when the most learning per day is taking place in a child's life.
- The fact that the provider is a teacher who requires training.

Parents and Children Meeting Their Potential

With proper early ed programs in place, both parents and children can reach their full potential: parents, by having the flexibility to be successful in the workplace and to earn good wages for their families, and children by being in the kind of environment that promotes their healthy development.

Giving Parents Choices

Early ed will give parents the alternative of helping support the family through work or staying at home with their child. Right now, many parents are unable to maintain full employment because of the prohibitive costs of quality child care, or are forced to leave their children with caregivers they may not have chosen if more alternatives were available. Early ed programs will offer parents choices about which providers they prefer, based on location, values, or other factors.

With respect to choice, early ed is more like current higher education than primary schools.

Parents and Early Ed as Partners

Early ed cannot, and does not try to, replace parents. Rather, early ed is a valuable partner for parents, working toward the common goal of raising children as well as possible. Early ed is a trusted backup for working parents and a trusted advisor for parents who choose to stay at home.

Reframing the First Six Years: Learning from Birth

Learning starts at birth. The most learning per day takes place between birth and age six.

Natural Learning vs. Study

Before age six, most learning is "natural," in that it comes through natural interaction and exposure to a rich environment. Early ed providers play an important, active role in the natural learning process. They provide guidance and create an appropriate setting in which children explore and interact in the ways which help them learn.

Learning to Learn

Between birth and age six, one's ability to learn, interest in learning, and attitude toward learning are shaped for life. If you go to elementary school without a positive attitude and aptitude for learning, you'll get much less out of school, and in extreme cases, very little.

Learning "The Basics"

Young children learn things even more basic than skills like reading and writing. They learn attitudes toward education, respect for themselves and others, the ability to interact appropriately, and so on. These attitudes and abilities are the real basics on which the rest of education depends.

"Ramping Up" to School

Kids who have had the benefit of early ed rise smoothly into the school years and become used to learning and working with others. For many kids without early ed, entering school is more like hitting a wall—one that's very hard to climb.

Foundations for Learning

Between birth and age six, the foundations for learning are laid and they must be laid carefully. That is why we need "foundation teachers"—teachers trained in child development.

One suggestion is that such programs be called "Foundations Programs" or "Cornerstone Programs," and that teachers might be called "foundation teachers." "Foundation teachers" highlight the critical importance of early learning for later life, while "early learning," for example, just sounds like a chronological label.

The Moral and Social Foundations of the Child

It is during the years from birth to age six that a child's moral sensibility and basic social attitudes are formed—the moral and social foundations of the child.

The Foundations/Cornerstone of Society

At a time when many see the foundations of our moral and social life crumbling, early ed offers a chance to lay secure foundations for the future of society. The moral and social foundations of the child are the moral and social foundations of the society as a whole.

The Science Frame

(1) Our new understanding of child development comes from scientific discoveries. Just as science has helped us develop ways of preventing childhood diseases and improving nutrition, it can help us improve the conditions in which our children grow, learn, and develop. (2) Since scientific and technological progress have always been keys to our success as a nation, we need the brightest possible students to continue our tradition of research and exploration. By giving kids the best possible start in their education, early ed will help make sure we stay competitive in these critical areas.

The Brain Science Frame

Early learning takes place through the physical shaping of a child's brain. Neural connections not developed are lost; those established and reinforced will most likely be retained for life. Intellectual, moral, social, and emotional patterns established early have an impact throughout life, for better or worse.

The "Cognitive Revolution"

The explosion of research findings in the area of cognitive function and cognitive development marks a revolution—a profound transformation in our understanding of the mind. This is an ongoing revolution, with new progress being made every day.

The current K-12 educational system was more or less set in the 19th century; we can do better now, thanks to more than a century of advances in the study of the mind and learning.

The Shaping Metaphor

Children's experiences from birth to age six shape them for life. "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree."

The Nutrition Metaphor

Early ed is nutrition for the mind. A child whose mind is starved cannot develop normally—intellectually, socially, emotionally, or morally.

This is not just about extreme cases. As with nutrition, there is a continuum: the better the mind is nourished from birth to age six, the better it develops.

The Cultivation Metaphor

Young children are like plants at their most tender and critical stage. Like seedlings, they must be tended and cultivated to promote the best possible growth.

Kids as a Resource versus Kids as a Drain

Kids are the raw material from which a society is made. The quality of that material is determined in the years from birth to age six. Kids will either be a valuable resource for all of us, or a drain on all of us, depending on how they develop from birth to age six.

Investment in the Future

Early ed is an investment in the future of our society. The time and resources invested in it will pay off in many ways:

- A better educated and more productive workforce.
- More people able to take care of themselves.
- Less crime.
- Less expenditure on prisons and law enforcement.
- Less fear.
- A better society to live in.

Getting in on the Ground Floor

Just as money invested early in a successful enterprise yields a higher return later, so investment in a child's earliest learning pays the most dividends later. Early ed is an even better investment than later education because of the critical nature of development in the years from birth to age six.

Citizens of Tomorrow

The kids who benefit from early ed are the citizens of tomorrow—better educated, better adjusted, and more productive.

Crime Prevention

Since research has established such clear links between early childhood experience and later criminal behavior, early ed can help make our society safer.

Early Ed as a Solution to the Education Problem

The main problem with education these days is that students do not come to school ready to learn actively and with a respect and aptitude for learning. Early ed can help develop the skills and attitudes that make children over the age of six better students. Early Ed is, therefore, not a new problem for education. It is, rather, a solution to our educational problems.

The Proper Role of Government: Ensuring Safety and Quality

Frames of regulation, inspection, protection, and accountability raise the specters of potential problems with the system. They should be avoided. Instead one should use frames of standards and accreditation.

Child development and early ed are areas where a great deal is known about the requisite quality of education and care needed by children from birth to age six. Government has the resources to continue funding research into these areas, to help set guidelines for quality. Government also has the resources to accredit particular providers, that is, to make sure they meet the high standards set by parents, communities, and researchers.

An Issue for Everyone

Early ed presents an opportunity for people in ALL levels of society. Families in all but the highest income brackets face the problem of finding quality care and training for their

"A better society treats its children better. In the past century, we eliminated child labor abuses. We now need to make further progress."

young children. Early ed is an issue that UNITES all of us. It is for everyone, not just for the poor. To provide early ed, all levels of society and all parts of the country must work together.

The Team Metaphor

Every member of the community shares an interest in early ed. To achieve it, communities have to pull together and work as a team.

The Family Metaphor

Communities are families. A family is irresponsible if it does not care for its children. Communities, like families, share a common fate. The whole family prospers when all its children prosper.

The Sensible Management of Costs for Child Development

Old age is paid for by a lifetime of investment. Public schooling has been paid for by minimal taxes on everyone in society. Both costs are spread out over many, many people and over many, many years. People pay for retirement when they are most able, and all of society shares the burden of educating our children, since the outcome helps everyone.

Right now, the cost of high-quality child care and development is not spread out in those ways; it falls all at once on individual parents at a time when they can least afford it. Early ed allows society to do a more sensible, efficient, and effective job of managing the costs of helping the nation's children develop to their fullest potential.

Progress in the Decent Treatment of Children

A better society treats its children better. In the past century, we've reduced infant mortality, eliminated child labor abuses, increased literacy, and raised our awareness level of the problem of child abuse. We now need to make further progress to enable our children to develop to their full potential.

ANSWERING BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT EARLY ED

What's the difference between early ed and day care?

- Early ed is about giving kids the environment that best promotes their development.
- Day care is about keeping kids warm and safe until their parents pick them up.
- Day care is basically "child storage."
- Day care often amounts to babysitting. Early ed involves interaction that best promotes children's early learning. Knowing what kinds of interaction do this requires providers to have significant training in the area of child development.
- Early ed is about kids' needs; day care is about parents' needs.

How does early ed help children?

- Early ed provides an environment where kids are given the best chance to develop to their full potential.
- Since the first six years of life shape us in critical ways, early ed can have a major, positive impact on how happy and successful a child is in later life. It can also have a significant impact on how well the child will do as learning continues into primary school.

- We have to shift from the idea of merely "taking care of" children in day care centers to the idea of providing the best learning environment for children. Children will get much more out of each day of early ed than they do out of the same time spent in day care.
- Imagine a fourth-grade class where the only goal is to keep children safe throughout the day. (Unfortunately, this is not a rarity.) It's even more unacceptable to ignore the learning of children in the critical age group of birth to six years.

How does early ed help families?

- Most new parents will tell you that they need all the help they can get.
- Early ed programs will be partners with parents, helping them provide what's best for children: trusted backups for working parents and trusted advisors for stay-at-home parents.
- Early ed will give parents choices about whether to support the family through work or by staying home with children, and about what kind of provider they feel is best for their child. (Greater availability means more alternatives.)
- Right now, parents often know very little about the activities at day care centers. Early ed programs will give parents more knowledge about what their children are doing during the day and how they are benefiting from it. In this way, early ed will allow working parents to be more involved with the care of their children than they are now.
- Part of the point of early ed is to raise public awareness about children's development and what factors promote it.
- Just as parents are glad to learn more about what foods are good for their children, they'll be glad to learn more about the environments and activities that promote their children's development.
- Just as parents now understand that exercise is important for children's health, they'll be glad to understand the kinds of stimulation and interaction that are important for the development of their children's minds.
- Early ed will include the training of parents who want this kind of knowledge.

How does early ed help society?

- Early ed is an investment in society's future.
- Children who spend time in higher-quality environments make better learners, more responsible citizens, and more productive members of the workforce. They are less likely to be burdens on society in the future and more likely to contribute to it.
- [See "Crime Prevention" frame]
- Imagine that you could reach back into the childhood of someone who isn't a successful and contributing member of society—for example, a criminal or someone who is unemployed or homeless. If you had improved the conditions that child was raised in, you may have had a real chance of making the adult more successful. Early ed represents an opportunity for us to make that fantasy a reality for tomorrow's adults.
- Early ed is important economically because it will allow many women to work who currently must stay home because they can't afford child care. This means it is an investment in overall productivity.

- Early ed is important economically because it will allow children to gain more from their later education and therefore contribute to the economy in ways that might not be otherwise possible for them.

What can an early ed provider do that a parent can't?

- Ideally, nothing. But before we reach that ideal we need to raise parents' awareness about basic child development. One goal of early ed is to raise the level of public understanding about what children need and when, so that good parents can be even better parents.
- A trained early ed provider isn't a substitute for a mother, but may know some things that many mothers don't know—for example, what kinds of explanations a two-year-old child can or can't understand.
- Early ed is not about discouraging mothers from being at home with their children. It's about making sure every child spends the day with someone caring and reliable who also knows a lot about the kinds of environment and attention young children need.

What can early ed do for parents who do stay home with their own children?

- Early ed programs will include training (and possibly funding) for parents who'd like to know more about how children develop and what they need in order to get the best possible start in life.

Why do child care providers need training? Isn't it enough that they be reliable and caring?

- There is a huge amount to know about how the early treatment of children affects them and about what kinds of interactions children at different ages need. Though many people have a good intuitive knowledge of the kinds of things children need, just as many do not.
- Adequately teaching and caring for a group of other people's young children is a very different skill from raising your own.
- Even a naturally great mother needs other skills to adequately teach and provide for a group of other people's children.

"A trained early ed provider isn't a substitute for a mother, but may know some things that many mothers don't know—for example, what kinds of explanations a two-year-old child can or can't understand."

What's the difference between early ed and school?

- Early ed isn't about starting children in school at an earlier age. For example, it's not about babies sitting at desks.
- In early ed, learning takes place naturally through action and interaction, rather than through study. There is also more of an emphasis on nurturing the child and promoting the child's emotional well-being as a foundation for later learning and character.
- In a sense, early ed is on a continuum with school. Think of the big differences between how first grade and twelfth grade work. It's not just that first and twelfth-graders read different books; first-graders are more closely supervised, focused on more fundamental activities, given more time for rest and for supervised play, and so on. Early ed extends these differences much further.

ANSWERING TOUGH/HOSTILE QUESTIONS ABOUT EARLY ED

Americans have gotten along fine without early ed so far. Why do we need it now when we didn't need it before?

Not everyone has gotten along just fine.

- The current chaos in many schools reflects a lack of early ed.
- The current lack of responsibility and respect on the part of many young people reflects inadequate early ed.
- The recurrent poverty of certain segments of society is, in part, a function of never having had adequate early ed.
- We've always needed better early ed. But we need it more now than ever. There are two reasons.
  (1) Our economy is different now. It absolutely requires better educated workers.
  (2) Our economy makes it harder for at least one parent to stay at home with a child.

Won't early ed just mean more inefficient government bureaucracy?

- Reframe to the need for early ed.
- You don't get rid of the police or public transportation or schools just because they're expensive. Like these institutions, early ed is essential for communities.
- Early ed will be implemented locally. The government will set standards and communities will provide the structures and the people to make the programs happen. Parents will have choices about caregivers, as families currently have choices about colleges.
- Is early ed just for poor parents, or parents on welfare? No. Use the frame "An Issue for Everyone."

Is paying for child care really such a hardship right now? Doesn't everyone have someone they can leave their children with—a relative, a neighbor, or someone?

- First, it really is a hardship. Such extended family arrangements are rare these days.
- Second, it's not just a matter of leaving your children with someone. Reframe to the difference between early ed and day care.

Why do children need to learn anything before they start school? What can they learn from birth to age six?

- Everyone knows that children learn important basic skills before the age of six—walking, talking, and so on. But other important things they learn are more subtle. Use the Brain Science and Foundations for Learning frames.

Doesn't the government already have enough (too much) influence in our daily lives and the lives of our children?

- Just as we need government to set water safety standards and food and drug standards, so we need uniform high standards for child care and development. Our

"Just as we need government to set water safety standards and food and drug standards, so we need uniform high standards for child care and development."

children's minds are every bit as vital to us as a our water and our food, and standards for their development should be no lower, nor subject to the whims of local special interests.
- Nearly everything about early ed will be local. The government role will be limited to providing information, basic standards, and funding.

Why should I pay for care for someone else's children?

- Use the Investment in the Future frame, the Team metaphor, and the Family metaphor.
- "Someone else's children" are your children's society. These are the people for whom they will be working and with whom they'll be interacting throughout their lives. The more able the "other children" are, the better your children's world will be.
- If early ed is established, eventually everyone will have had the advantage of it, and every adult will owe it to the next generation to provide early ed. Just as you had the advantages of going to school and having someone else pay for it, so you owe the same advantage to next generation of Americans.

Shouldn't parents be responsible for their own children?

- They are, and they always will be. But our economy has changed and not all parents can stay home with their children, even if they want to. Moreover, early ed can provide things to children that even great parents cannot. Early ed also provides training for parents, and most parents can benefit from that training.
- In addition, we all benefit from children having early ed, and, therefore, we are all responsible for providing it.

If my child spends all day with an early ed provider, whose values will he learn? For example, will he learn the kind of discipline I feel is important?

- With early ed, parents will still be the primary source of their children's values.
- What children will learn from early ed is compatible with any parent's values: a sense of responsibility for oneself and others, respect for others and the ability to interact effectively with others, confidence in one's own abilities, and much, much more.
- A child who comes to respect others and who develops an aptitude for learning will be in a better position to learn and to live up to the parents' values.

Shouldn't moms stay at home with their children? And aren't children better off if they do?

- The economics of our society put this possibility out of reach for many families, and especially for single moms.
- Women shouldn't have to choose between economic survival and a good environment for their children.
- Early ed is a partner with parents; it does not replace parents.
- Early ed can help moms who do stay at home become better moms.

SUGGESTED TERMINOLOGY

Here are some terms that you can use instead of day care. Try them out and see which work best for you.

Early Ed
Pre-school (an expansion of the existing concept)
Pre-Ed
First Ed
First Steps Program
First Step
Family School
Foundations Program
Cornerstones Program
Foundations Teachers

Second Family
Family 2
Family Too Center
Family School
Hearth School
Playschool
Child Development Center
Family Development Center
Early School
Early Center
Early Circle
Family Center
Growth Center
Family Learning Center
Early Learning Center
Community Child Center
Early Learning Circle
Early Schoolhouse
Kid Circle
Neighborhood Child Center
Home Away From Home

PUBLIC ATTITUDES ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECE)

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Note: these highlights summarize findings from many different surveys detailed in the table at the end of the report. Small differences between levels of support should not be considered reliable, but the orders of magnitude may be considered comparable since the surveys were all of strong sample sizes (1,000-1,500 respondents). Dates and sources of surveys are shown in footnotes to the table. This is a preliminary analysis to be followed by another analysis examining differences in opinion among demographic groups.

VIEWS ABOUT ECE IN PARTICULAR

Financing and other public policy

Surveys. There is strong latent support for increased financial assistance for ECE, but it is not on the top of people's agendas. The welfare-to-work issue was crystallized in specific legislation and generated tremendous support for assistance to allow low-income women to work. There is an opportunity to crystallize and mobilize support for broader efforts as well. The public responds more positively when proposals are stated as "education" rather than as "child care."

- Substantial support (53 percent "strongly support" and 82 percent "support at all") for the President's proposals on child care among the half of the public that is aware of them; support for tax credit part is more bipartisan and deeper (71percent) than for the spending part (63 percent; Republicans oppose 51/46).
- Support for tax credits for both business (73 percent) and families (71 percent).
- Major support (ranging from 67 percent-92 percent in several surveys) for helping low-income parents work as an alternative to welfare; considered "effective" and "essential" in multiple surveys.
- High priority (79 percent) for government spending on "preschool education programs for children" and support for large increase in funding for a early childhood education in public schools with highest percentage of children in poverty (74 percent).
- Three-quarters (78 percent) of those who rank ECE as very or extremely important to them personally; express somewhat lower importance (71percent) for "child care;" use of "early childhood education" term avoids drop off of support for those with income over $50K.
- Two-thirds of those surveyed (67 percent) think improving the quality of public schools would be a very effective way to help children; one-third (34 percent) think more government funding of child care and health programs would be very effective.
- Most of those surveyed (85 percent) agree that parents who are trying hard to do a good job raising children need programs to support them (55 percent agree strongly).
- Stereotyping, i.e., the belief that a majority of Head Start beneficiaries are African American or other minorities, is revealed in two different surveys.

Focus Group Insights

Lake Research (for the Kauffman Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts):

- Broad belief that children should be a top priority, but few believe they really are; ECE not a top priority for voters who are split between seeing it as a parents' issue and a business issue.
- Division over whether there is a role for government in making children a higher priority, with mothers and African Americans more favorable to a government role and non-parents and men believing families should take more responsibility; general agreement that families have prime role in setting standards for children.
- Few people see child care as a right, but many see public education as a right; child care seen as a result of choice to have a child and go back to work; but education seen as a benefit for everyone; hesitancy and resistance to notion of universal child care; seen as individual rather than governmental responsibility.
- See a role for government in assurance of quality, standards, and monitoring.
- Prefer financing mechanisms with a choice, public-private partnerships, tax credits, and business contributions; support sliding fee for care; see it as benefit for working poor, not for middle class.

Children's Defense Fund (CDF):

- Concern for school-age care, response to statistics about high percent of crime occurring between 3 and 7 p.m.
- Do not like government intervention.
- Like tax credits to business; willing to help families with less than $35,000 annual income.

Nature of ECE, importance of quality care

Surveys. There is support for quality care; educational language is more relevant for ages three to five than ages birth to three, where safety and nurturing is primary; will need to differentiate by age or combine language appropriate to each age group.

- Eighty-nine percent consider it difficult for most American families to find affordable, high-quality child care; 57 percent say it is very or extremely difficult.
- A majority of parents intend to start sending their child to preschool or school at age 3 or 4 (56 percent), while only 7 percent plan to send one-or two-year-olds to school, including pre-school.
- Seventy-two percent of children ages birth to three are cared for by a parent, 10 percent by a relative, and only 18 percent by a child care teacher or babysitter.
- A majority (53 percent) believes a child will not suffer if its mother works; only 8 percent strongly agree a child will suffer.
- Child care workers are seen only as a source of advice about raising children by 41 percent, and only 6 percent turn to them often.

Focus Group Insights

Lake Research:

- Good quality means striving for an environment similar to being brought up in the home, plus being safe, clean, and affordable; "socialization" is important at early ages.
- Want a nurturing, structured environment with an emphasis on learning.
- Believe good quality care is available if you can afford it; have negative impressions about average quality of care, concerned about children being mistreated

"A majority of Americans believes a child will not suffer if the mother works."

CDF:

- Support the concept of early learning.
- Respond to facts about wages, training, and relationship of quality to affordability.
- Tend to separate education concept from child care.

Surveys. The Role of Women and Work; Family values

Surveys. The general public and mothers are both ambivalent about women's roles as workers and mothers.

- Forty-one percent say it is bad for society that more mothers of young children are working outside the home, compared to 37 percent who say it is neither good or bad, and only 17 percent saying it is good.
- More than three-fourths of both mothers and non-mother women say it is harder to be a mother today than 20-30 years ago, and 56 percent of mothers say they are doing a worse job than their own mothers; yet almost two-thirds (62 percent) of mothers are mostly satisfied with how they are doing, one-third (35 pecent) is very satisfied, and only 2 percent are dissatisfied.
- Fewer than one-third (29 percent) say most parents can do a good job raising children if both parents work full-time or if there is a single parent (28 percent); half to two-thirds say most can do a good job if the father works full-time and mother works part-time (54 percent) or stays home (66 percent).
- Twice as many parents (60 percent) say the mother or female partner is responsible for child's basic care each day than say it is shared equally (29 percent); only 7 percent of males take primary responsibility.
- Employers get good grades, with 39 percent somewhat and 40 percent very sensitive to workers' personal situations, including child care needs.

Focus Group Insights

Lake Research:

- Belief that pursuit of money is main obstacle to effective parenting; disagreement about whether working hard is an economic necessity or sign of moral decay.

Personal Salience of ECE Issues

Surveys. A substantial minority of the population utilizes paid, out-of-home child care, and child care arrangements are considered important to work performance. A note for perspective: even though fewer than 20 percent of adults receive social security/Medicare benefits, they are supported by 80 percent of the population.

- One in four (24 percent) adults have used or needed child care in the past five years; three-quarters (76 percent) have not; but only 20 percent have never used a child care provider since their baby was born; one-third (32 percent) have a child receiving care outside the home.
- A majority of parents (59 percent) do not worry about being able to find or afford good child care; a quarter (28 percent) worry a little, and only one in eight (12 percent) worry a lot.
- Almost two-thirds (61 percent) of mothers of school-age children say they are usually there when their children get home from school.

- A majority (57 percent) of parents of children ages birth to three say that absence of child care has NOT prevented them or their spouse from taking a job; but a majority (52 percent) say absence of child care has reduced their job performance.
- People are split on whether on-site child care would be very important in looking for a job (41 percent) or not important (44 percent).
- Twice as many adults are very (30 percent) or somewhat (15 percent) worried about having adequate child care when they go to work; only a quarter (26 percent) are not worried.
- Only one is six (17 percent) has been unable to care for a sick child or relative due to their job; three-quarters have never had to leave a child alone when they thought an adult should be present.

Focus Group Insights
Lake Research:

- A temporary crisis, eliminated as children age, not like health care, which remains a constant concern.

CDF:

- Not a crisis, except for young parents and African-American families.

RELEVANT FINDINGS FROM KEY SURVEYS ABOUT CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Great Expectations
Lake Research and Tarrance Group for The Coalition for America's Children, 1996

- Strong support for "children's issues, like education and health care" in general, with a clear majority supporting increased spending for children, even if it means increasing the deficit or taxes (at the $100-per-year level).
- Almost two-thirds (64 percent) say government should play a strong role in solving problems facing children today.
- Education is the top children's agenda item for the public, including strong support for on-site care before and after school. One-third (33 percent) say education is top priority for federal action for children—only 1 percent cite "day care."
- Two-thirds (70 percent) support funding to provide quality preschool programs for three-and four-year-olds in public schools as a way to improve education.
- There is strong support (86 percent) for requiring employers to allow unpaid leave for family responsibilities.
- "Teachers in your community" are the most trusted source for accurate information about children's issues; parental and family involvement in classrooms and decision making are top ranked reforms.

Kids These Days
Public Agenda Foundation, 1996

- Americans are more concerned with children's character, values, and sense of a "moral meltdown" than with health, safety, or poverty.

- Parents get the blame—only 22 percent say it's common for parents to be a good role model for children, and most say parents fail to exert appropriate discipline.
- Only 27 percent say it is common for mothers to give up time with their children and work to gain personal satisfaction; 75% say mothers are going to work to make ends meet.
- People believe that children need love and guidance to thrive; 72 percent say "given enough love and guidance, just about any child can be reached."

KEY FINDINGS FROM SELECTED PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS, 1994-98 (IN PERCENTAGES)

	Support Strongly	Support at All	Oppose
ABOUT ECE IN PARTICULAR			
Financing and Other Public Policy			
Clinton proposal: Tax breaks, grants, and subsidies to make child care more affordable for low-income families[1]	53	82	16
Tax credits for child care (use of surplus)[2] Support = top/high priority; oppose = low priority	24	69	30
Tax credits for child care (use of surplus)[3] Support = top/high priority; oppose = low priority	20	63	30
Federal government should spend more, less, same for child care for low-income and working parents[4]	Spend more = 50	Less = 5	No government role = 26
Increase federal spending to provide child care assistance to working parents[5] (Note partisan split: Republicans oppose 51/46)		63	34
Tax credits to families earning less than $60,000 to help pay for child care[6] (note: bipartisan support)		71	26
Aware of Clinton's new proposal to make child care more available and affordable[7]		Aware = 51	Not make aware = 48
Favor/oppose Clinton's proposals (if aware of proposals)[8]		67	24
Child care costs for welfare recipients going to work: who should help pay[9]	Government = 37	Employer = 18 Both = 13	Not obligated to pay = 28
Government funding child care and health care is an effective way to help kids[10]	34	76	22
Government must provide help to low-income parents find/keep a job[11]	Child care = 67	Job training 76	Tax breaks to business = 71
Priority for government—day care for poor children so parents can work[12]	53	87	12
Priority for government—preschool education programs for children[13]	45	79	20
Federal tax incentives for corporations to invest in child care[14]		73	23
Government should pay for child care while welfare mothers work, vs. mothers pay[15]	Government pay = 48	Both = 12	Mothers pay = 36
Who should be primarily responsible for access to child care[16]	Government = 15	Employers = 23	Families = 60
Head start recipients—more are white/black[17]	White = 25	Equal = 16	Black = 36
Head start recipients are mostly minority[18]	Most not minority = 37		Most are minority = 52
Providing child care is essential to improving welfare[19]	Absolutely essential = 68	Important, not essential = 32	
Child care for poor mothers who leave welfare for work, effective in improving welfare system[20]	Very = 77%	Moderate= 15%	Not very = 8%
Cut the Head Start program to balance the federal budget while avoiding raising taxes[21]		Favor = 37	Oppose = 56
Welfare proposal: subsidized child care for poor mothers who leave welfare for work[22]		Favor = 92	Oppose = 7

	Support Strongly	Support at All	Oppose
Large increase in federal funding for early childhood education in public schools with highest percentage of children in poverty[23]		Favor = 74	Oppose = 22
Early childhood education is personally important[24]	Extremely = 34	Very = 78	Not very, not at all = 5
Child care is personally important[25]	Extremely = 30	Very = 71	Not very, not at all = 11
Parents who are trying hard to do a good job raising their children need programs to support them[26]	55	85	14
How effective a way to help kids: improve the quality of the public schools[27]	67		
How effective a way to help kids: more government funding for child care and health programs[28]	34		
Nature of ECE: Quality, Importance ...			
How difficult is it for most American families to find affordable, high-quality child care[29]	Extremely, very = 57	Somewhat = 32	Not very/ at all = 9
Where to turn for advice and guidance about how to raise child; selection = child care worker of babysitters[30]	A lot = 6	Some, little = 35	Not at all = 59
At what age do you plan to send child to school, including preschool[31]	Age 1, 2 = 7	Age 3, 4 = 56	Age 5, 6 = 19
Is preschool child likely to suffer if mother works[32]	Disagree = 53	Agree = 36	Strong agree = 8
Role of Women and Work; Family Values			
Has primary responsibility for child's basic care each day[33]	Mother/female = 60	Share equally = 29	Father/male = 7
Possible major causes of decline in personal values; lack of child care for children of working parents[34]	Major = 39	Minor = 39	Not a cause = 17
Federal government could strengthen family values by...requiring employers to allow parental leave for new baby, sick child[35]			
How sensitive is your employer about personal situations, e.g., flex schedule, child care needs	Very = 40	Somewhat = 39	Not very, not at all = 17
Easier/harder to be a mother today than 20-30 year ago (report for non-mothers; almost same for mothers)[36]	Harder = 78	Same = 11	Easier = 9
Problems for working moms: finding someone to watch kids[37]		Yes = 42	
How satisfied with job you are doing as mother[38]	Very = 35	Mostly satisfied = 62	Mostly, very dissatisfied = 2
Mothers today doing better/worse job than own mothers[39]	Better = 11	Same = 27	Worse = 56
How many parents can do a good job raising kids today in following situations:[40]	**Most**	**Some**	**Few**
Both work full-time	29	50	16
Father full-time, mother part-time	54	38	5
Father full-time, mother stays home	66	29	3
Single mothers	28	54	13
Divorced, split custody	17	50	23

	Support Strongly	Support at All	Oppose
Good or bad for society: more mothers of young children working outside the home[41]	Good = 17	Neither good nor bad = 37	Bad = 41
Personal Salience of Issue			
How worried will you be to find or afford good day care[42]	A lot = 12	Some, little = 28	Not at all = 59
Do any of your children go to day/child care outside home[43]	Yes=32	No = 67	
Do you hire for regular in-home care[44]	Yes = 8	No = 92	
Have you, spouse, partners used or needed child care in past 5 years[45]	Have = 24		Have not = 76
Does someone beside spouse or partner care for child on regular basis[46]	Center, paid provider = 29	Family = 32	No outside care = 40
Who takes care of child most weekdays[47]	Worker, baby-sitter, teacher = 18	Relative = 10	A parent = 72
Where care provided[48]	Day care facility = 32	Someone else's home = 54	At home = 14
How many providers since born[49]	3+ = 27	1 or 2 = 52	None = 20
In past five years, has absence of acceptable child care prevented you or partner/spouse from taking a job (only asked if used/needed child care in past five years)[50]	Has = 43		Has not = 57
How difficult to get affordable child care (only asked if used/needed child care in past five years)[51]	Extremely, very = 51	Somewhat = 20	Not = 2
In past five years, has absence of child care reduced your or partner/spouse's ability to do job as well as wanted (only asked if used/ needed child care in past five years)[52]	Has = 52		Has not = 47
Ever been unable to care for a sick child or relative due to job[53]		Yes = 17	No = 83
If looking for job, how important is on-site child care[54]	Very = 41	Somewhat = 13	Not to/ at all = 44
How important is availability of good day care for where you live[55]	55	68	30
How old were you when your mother first worked full-time outside home (asked if mother ever held full-time job while growing up)[56]	0-6 = 43	6-12 = 37	13+ = 20
Concerned about not having adequate child care when go to work (asked of all; 29% not applicable)[57]	Very = 30	Somewhat = 15	Not too, not at all = 26
Times in last year you left child alone when should have an adult present[58]	6+ = 8	1-5 = 17	Never = 75
How often worry about finding affordable child care you can trust[59]	Very often = 6	Often, time to time = 16	Never = 54
How often there when child gets home from school (asked of parents of school-age kids only)[60]	Usually = 61	Not usually = 38	

	Support Strongly	Support at All	Oppose
RELEVANT FINDINGS FROM KEY SURVEYS ABOUT CHILDREN'S ISSUES IN GENERAL			
How important are "children's issues, like education and health care" (on scale of 1-10)[61]	8.6 Average (Highest)		
Support for increased spending for children, even if it means increasing the deficit[62]		56	
. . . or increasing taxes (by $100 per year)[63]		63	
Education as "single most important action" for federal government to address problems facing children[64]		33 (Next highest = 8)	
Day care as "single most important action" for federal government to address problems facing children[65]		1	
How important to expand funding to provide quality preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds in public schools[66]	29	65	31
How important to require employers to allow unpaid leave for family responsibilities[67]	50	86	14
Trusted sources of accurate information about children: "Teachers in your community"[68]		20 (Ranked highest = 15)	
Preferred education reforms: family involvement in classrooms and decision-making[69]		22 (Ranked highest = 15)	
Kids suffering from economic pressure on parents is widespread[70]		67	
Kids failing to learn such values as honesty, respect, and responsibility is serious problem[71]		61	
It is common for parents to be good role models for children[72]		22	
It is common for mothers to give up time with their kids and work to gain person satisfaction[73]		27	
Mothers are giving up time with children and working to help their family make ends meet[74]		75	
Given enough love and guidance, just about any kid can be reached		72	

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Lake Research for the Kauffman Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts, 1996[75]

Focus Groups Conducted for the Children's Defense Fund, 1996[76]

[1] *Los Angeles Times*, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[2] Yankelovich Partners, Inc., January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[3] Gallup Organization, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[4] ABC News and *The Washington Post*, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[5] Princeton Survey Research Associates, January 1998.

[6] Princeton Survey Research Associates, January 1998.

[7] Louis Harris and Associates, January 1998.

[8] Louis Harris and Associates, January 1998.

[9] Associated Press, January 1997 and the Roper Archives.

[10] Public Agenda Foundation, December 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[11] Associated Press, June 1996 and Roper Archives.

[12] Yankelovich Partners, Inc., May 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[13] Yankelovich Partners, Inc., May 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[14] Yankelovich Partners, Inc., May 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[15] CBS News/*The New York Times*, December 1995 and Roper Archives.

[16] Louis Harris and Associates, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[17] ABC News, April 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[18] *The Washington Post*, July 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[19] Public Agenda Foundation, December 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[20] Hart and Teeter Research Companies, April 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[21] Washington Post Pole, December 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[22] Hart and Teeter Research Companies, April 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[23] Gallup Organization, May 1994 and the Roper Archives.

[24] Caravan Opinion Research Corporation for Ad Council, March 1998.

[25] Caravan Opinion Research Corporation for Ad Council, March 1998.

[26] Caravan Opinion Research Corporation for Ad Council, March 1998.

[27] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda Foundation, December, 1996.

[28] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda Foundation, December, 1996.

[29] Louis Harris and Associates Jan 1998 and Roper Archives.

[30] Princeton Survey Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[31] Princeton Survey Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[32] National Opinion Research Center, February 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[33] Peter D. Hart Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[34] Michaels Opinion Research, August 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[35] Wirthlin Group, July 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[36] Princeton Survey Research, March 1997 and for Pew Center.

[37] Princeton Survey Research, March 1997 and for Pew Center.

[38] Princeton Survey Research, March 1997 and for Pew Center.

[39] Princeton Survey Research, March 1997 and for Pew Center.

[40] Princeton Survey Research, March 1997 and for Pew Center.

[41] Princeton Survey Research, March 1997 and for Pew Center.

[42] Princeton Survey Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[43] Gallup Organization, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[44] Gallup Organization, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[45] Louis Harris and Associates, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[46] Peter D. Hart Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[47] Princeton Survey Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[48] Princeton Survey Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[49] Peter D. Hart Research Associates, March 1997 (Parents 0-3) and the Roper Archives.

[50] Louis Harris and Associates, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[51] Louis Harris and Associates, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[52] Louis Harris and Associates, January 1998 and the Roper Archives.

[53] National Opinion Research Center, February 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[54] Princeton Survey Research Associates, March 1997 and the Roper Archives.

[55] Institute for Social Inquirey/Roper Center, December 1996 and the Roper Archives.

[56] Center for Survey Research, University of Virginia, January 1996 and the Roper Archives.

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[58] Gallup Organization, August 1995 and the Roper Archives.

[59] The Tarrance Group and Lake Research, July 1995 and the Roper Archives.

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[62] *Great Expectations: How American Voters View Children's Issues*, Lake Research and The Tarrance Group for The Coalition for America's Children, December 1996.

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[65] *Great Expectations: How American Voters View Children's Issues*, Lake Research and The Tarrance Group for The Coalition for America's Children, December 1996.

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[67] *Great Expectations: How American Voters View Children's Issues*, Lake Research and The Tarrance Group for The Coalition for America's Children, December 1996.

[68] *Great Expectations: How American Voters View Children's Issues*, Lake Research and The Tarrance Group for The Coalition for America's Children, December 1996.

[69] *Great Expectations: How American Voters View Children's Issues*, Lake Research and The Tarrance Group for The Coalition for America's Children, December 1996.

[70] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda Foundation, December, 1996.

[71] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda Foundation, December, 1996.

[72] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda Foundation, December, 1996.

[73] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda Foundation, December, 1996.

[74] *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, Public Agenda Foundation, December, 1996.

[75] Lake Research for Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts, September 1996.

[76] Focus groups in multiple locations with diverse ethnic groups. Findings from Helen Blank, the Children's Defense Fund, and personal communication.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES FOR ADVOCATES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION—A FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Full Circle Associates, Seattle, Washington
Nancy White
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Overview

Full Circle Associates, a communications consulting firm, conducted two focus groups for the "Communications Strategies for Advocates of Early Childhood Education" project as directed by Richard Brandon from the University of Washington Human Services Policy Center, in collaboration with Susan Bales of the Benton Foundation. The groups were run on March 16, 1998, in Seattle with an African-American group and March 19, 1998, in South King County/Kent with a Caucasian group. The African-American group was mixed age and socioeconomic background and self-identified predominantly as Democrats. The South King County group was middle-income, more conservative, and older as a group, with one younger couple expressing significantly more liberal views. Complete demographic information on the groups can be found in the Appendix.

The goal of the two focus groups was to test participants' reactions to a series of metaphors, frameworks, and labels for early education for children ages birth to six. The objective was to identify those labels that could be helpful in convincing people to support public policies for improved affordability and quality of early childhood care and education.

Full Circle project staff focused on close observation of the following:

- The framing of the issue and the potential to bridge between the dual needs of a parent's need to work and a child's need for good early education.
- Language that "not merely registers approval, but that excites audiences emotionally and could motivate them to act," or language that would "turn them inward, and make them say, just leave it to families."

Framing

Overall, the strongest thread throughout both groups and in every topic of inquiry was that of parental responsibility. There was strong support for the role of early education for education's sake, but not for moral development, which belonged firmly in the hands of parents. There was no consensus on how quality and cost would be addressed.

Parental Roles and Responsibility

The strongest response and agreement from both groups was the importance of parental responsibility for their child's early education. This thread was woven through all the conversations of both groups. It was clearly the bottom line for many of the participants.

The participants endorsed the need for parent education on how to help their child's education and development. Both groups seemed to agree that even if a parent has to work, they have an obligation to stay involved with their child's care and education. The Caucasian group suggested that parents ought to form councils to help set standards, and neighbors and communities should get together and talk about these issues. Both groups suggested that if a parent is at home, they also need to know how to help their child learn and grow.

"The participants endorsed the need for parent education on how to help their child's education and development."

There was also support for the concept of parents and teachers as partners, but with ultimate responsibility assumed by parents. They did not want teachers infringing on parental rights or roles. They suggested parents need to take a proactive role in working with the teachers and holding teachers accountable for quality care, with the caveat that not all parents know how to do this or know how to recognize quality care. Both groups acknowledged the need to pay and train teachers better.

Within the Caucasian group, there was a segment that showed a lack of willingness to make allowances for parents who didn't stay involved—in plain terms, they weren't accepting excuses. For parents who work, there was a level of expectation in that group about what would be an acceptable level of involvement. There were some similar comments in the African-American group, but with a larger margin of allowance.

There was not strong support in either group for the concept of "the moral and social foundation of the child is the moral and social foundation for society." They expressed the idea that the moral and social foundations of the family are the moral and social foundations of society—again reinforcing the importance of the parental role.

Quality and Importance of Early Childhood Education

Both groups understood and valued quality early childhood education (ECE). This was indicated by their appreciation for "good teachers," activities beyond custodial care ("I don't want my child in front of a TV"), their understanding of a child's cognitive and social developmental needs, and the need for parents to shop around for quality care. They showed understanding of the importance of the availability of quality care in a community, even if their personal preference might be that a parent stays home with their child.

Both groups felt that early investment (in the broadest sense, beyond just financial) in education, whether by parents or an early childhood education system, was important, and that it could influence or improve longer-range school outcomes and contribute to a stronger community, including benefiting business.

Both groups believed that the full continuum of education is important for their children, kindergarten through post-secondary, and did not fear "too much" education. They liked the science approach for validating the importance of early childhood education if done lightly—not too much technical information. Some members of the Caucasian group expressed distrust of some "science" and "research," yet also said they did not want to pay for any new program that was not "proven effective."

Quality Assurance and Financing

There was no strong consensus between the groups on a positive framework for addressing quality assurance and financing issues for early childhood education. While both groups felt that early development and learning were important, there was no single view on how and where a child should be afforded these opportunities—or who should be responsible for the quality assurance or financing. The African-American group expressed a stronger desire for more community accountability than the Caucasian group.

"I don't want my child in front of a TV," said one focus group participant.

There was a great deal of concern about how to finance early childhood care and a skepticism that communities would agree to additional financial commitments. All felt child care is an expensive proposition no matter who pays for it, and many expressed a degree of willingness to help share those costs. The older members of the Caucasian group were more likely to support individual financial responsibility—the "if there's a will, there's a way" approach to parents financing quality care.

The Caucasian group supported business investment in early childhood education, and they were somewhat less supportive of public funds being used to fund early child-

hood education for everyone—even while acknowledging the importance of the services. The African-American group did not get into as much discussion of funding, but expressed desire for better accountability for both an ECE system and the current K-12 system.

The Caucasian group addressed standards and regulation. They want quality care but want parents to specify what constitutes quality care (one suggestion was through parent councils and community conversations), rather than the government. They would also welcome recommended guidelines and actual checklists for parents to use to that they so can determine what is best for their children. Both groups stressed the importance of the need for parents to really scrutinize care they select and parent education on how to find quality care.

Participants who have younger children or who have experience in the education system had more realistic views about the current state of early childhood education and responded accordingly. Those without children or with grown children had a less current or realistic view of the early childhood system's strengths and weaknesses. They appeared to be drawing their conclusions on observations of society (some potentially driven by the media) and their personal political views.

Here are the specific responses to each approach tested:

Teachers and Parents as Partners

Following are examples of responses from each of the focus groups with regard to the specific concept of parents and teachers as partners.

Caucasian Focus Group

- Parents are responsible for making sure that day care providers or other caregivers are doing what they want done in terms of providing education to their children.
- Need conferences, telephone calls...can't be just on the teacher. The parent has to take responsibility, a cooperative effort.
- Parents have to make time in their schedules.

African-American Focus Group

- You have to know what your kid is doing. You have to be involved with the curriculum.
- Partnerships mean give and take on both sides. We need to know what the roles are on both sides. If you don't get involved, we let them do everything—we need to be partners.
- I think the biggest concern is that not enough parents ARE concerned.
- You need to keep the teachers in check.
- You have to give parents the key (role-modeling).
- There is this propaganda that you need preschool and kindergarten to thrive in school.
- The parents have to be sure they are an advocate for their kids.
- It all goes back to education—educating the parents. Have the school system teaching all so they can learn—then you are not going to have troubled kids down the line. Right now, you can go get a good education in one place, and not in another. Starting early, educate the parents—that's the bottom line. We're going to have our child. We're going to be that motivating force. We are going to "I Love You" regardless. That's what our job is. The more that parents can learn—nobody is going to help our children like us.

"It all goes back to education. Educating the parents," said one African American participant."

Learning from Birth

Following are examples of responses from each of the focus groups with regard to the specific concept of learning from birth.

Caucasian Focus Group

- Learning from birth is inevitable.
- Let a child be, and they will learn.
- What and how they learn is something else.

African-American Focus Group

- I learned a lot from my mother, but my teachers, I want them to make learning fun for me.
- Even before birth, I learned from her (referring to his mother).
- No, it is not natural...you can't just put a kid in a bouncer seat and think that is enough. Parents need more resources to know this and know how to do these things to stimulate your child.
- Our son has heard choir music since before birth—in utero—and he will always stop to listen to music.
- My mother said she read out loud to me, and I was reading out loud by the time I was four. It is like nutrition. It is important.
- Parents need to talk to babies. You can tell when babies have parents that talk to them—their eyes are bouncing up and down—you know they are going to make it.

Natural Learning versus Study

Following are examples of responses from each of the focus groups with regard to the specific concept of "natural learning versus study."

Caucasian Focus Group

- It's the role of the parent and the teacher.
- Parents have no clue what a "rich environment" is (said by teacher). They don't know to give their kids markers and books.
- Back in the old days, I could stay home with my kids—I could let them do things. Parents today don't have that luxury; they have to rely on day care providers.
- We have to work at being parents.
- It depends on values systems...some parents don't read to their children.
- Not paying attention to the natural ability to learn—that makes a difference. Whether it is a facility or in-home day care, sometimes kids just get parked in front of a TV.
- It depends on the motivation of the provider...it is necessary for the parent to be involved and to define what their children need.
- Parents assume that providers know what they are doing.
- Some parents don't care.
- There could be better guidelines for parents so they know what to look for—a checklist.
- It's all expensive.

African American Focus Group

- (Lots of head nodding.)
- Everyone has a God-given gift to do something. Parents have to be observant to find these gifts and help them develop.
- Study is harder than natural learning.
- When my son sees other kids doing things and he mimics it, then it is natural.

- If you see your parents succeeding at things, you will have confidence to succeed at things. It has to be the parents' and relatives' motivating force and example.
- It's learning to learn.

Moral and Social Foundation of the Child/Society

Following are example responses from each group on the specific concept of the moral and social foundation of the child/society.

Caucasian Focus Group

- Establishment of moral foundations starts with parents—we need to teach our children morals at home.
- Depends on how much TV they watch.
- When parents aren't teaching it, children need to get it somewhere.
- If parents don't have morals, there isn't much you can do.
- Need to teach young people to be better parents, but they don't care.

African-American Focus Group

- You are not trying to raise your child based on what is going on in society—there is a lot of bad stuff going on.
- If everyone is telling you, you are not going to do it. Family has to do this, because society does not provide the foundation.
- If we started at home, we wouldn't have all these problems.
- It starts at home.
- Is that true for all children? Not all children have parents who care. That's why early childhood education is important, if their parent's aren't doing that.
- You gotta help the parent do this. ECE works with the parent. Go out and work with the parent.
- If parents are given enough training, all parents will be proud of their kids.
- I don't believe that. There are some parents that are useless from the get-go. Kids can get beyond their parents' problems.

Science

Following are examples of responses from each group with regard to the concept of the role of science research.

Caucasian Focus Group

- It is important to know about research. It is a motivator.
- There are parents who will care about this and those who won't.
- The parent is a big part of early education.
- Parents rely on schools to teach their kids what they need to know (K-12).

African-American Focus Group

- The group nodded "no" in response to the idea that children don't learn before the age of six.
- Did Tolstoy's mama know all about this? Einstein's?
- Science is too involved in this. Whole language is the most God-awful horrible thing. What happened to phonics? It's silly.

- Don't get too technical with neurons and connections.
- There is an appreciation of how brains fire and don't fire, but if we get too deep into brain function, we'll get lost.
- Need to know this on a very broad level—but not the details.
- Don't change things that shouldn't be changed—like Dr. Spock did.
- We need to teach kids at an early age when they are hungry to learn—feed and feed and feed them as much as they want. At six it is too late.
- Get parents to understand how the brain works—having people realize the impact they can have on kids at an early age will really affect parents. Show them they have an influence.
- There is value to the concepts—but not the jargon.
- Need to know if your child has a need/problem before they go to school. The parent can then help the teacher.

Early Investment

Following are examples of focus group responses on the specific concept of the value of making an early investment in education.

Caucasian Focus Group

- We need to study this stuff before all the money is spent—test it and see if it works.
- Early education is more important that later education.
- Early education is important because you are setting a love of learning.
- Some kids need social interaction. That is a kind of learning. You have to learn to get along.
- It is stupid to play Mozart to the unborn.
- Early education is not the responsibility of the schools. It is the parents'.
- It is the parents' responsibility to see that day care provides what the children need.
- We need investment in morals. Today's kids will be running the country when I'm retired—we need to invest in early childhood education, but also need to invest in morals—how can you really affect them?
- It doesn't take a village to raise a child—it takes two parents.
- There won't be funds to really do anything, and the more services you provide, the more likely people will have more children.
- We need a complete investment—resources to education systems across the board—as a society, not as parents. We need to show parents how to raise their kids right if we want them to do it a certain way. If parents aren't doing a good job, we need to take over.

African-American Focus Group

- Lots of head-nodding and "Amens."
- If you lose them then (early), it is hard to get them back. It's hard to catch up. I'm sure we can all identify the kid who is lost.
- I think you should stress prenatal (care)—if we have X amount of dollars, focus on zero to age two.

ECE as a Solution to Education Problems

Following are examples of focus group responses on the specific concept of early childhood education as a solution to education problems.

Caucasian Focus Group

- You need to watch out that you don't label kids—they get labeled enough in schools.

African American Focus Group

- I think it goes both ways. It is a great benefit, but there are kids who have great ECE and then get lost in the Seattle Public School system—it does not fix ALL problems.
- I think that ECE is part of a continuum—focus on that, but up the chain too where the child goes. It has enormous value, but not unto itself if it is not supported the rest of the way along.
- You have to hold the public school system accountable, too. But it does not help if you label kids early—work to solve the problems, not label with no one working to change it.
- Parents need to do whatever they can. It all starts at home.

ECE as the First Step in the Education Process

Following are examples of responses from the focus groups on the specific concept of early childhood education as the first step in the education process.

Caucasian Focus Group

- It is more important to think about ECE than higher education. The difference between Washington State University and Harvard is not the same as the difference between a really bad day care and a good day care. At the college level, you have young adults who can have some control over their own learning experience. A seven-month-old baby can't control anything.
- Parents don't know enough about day care to make good decisions. (teacher).

African-American Focus Group

- Parents should scrutinize ECE the same as college—give the kid whatever advantages they can. I don't think we are concerned our kids will learn too much and become learning robots.
- We have to teach the kids to love learning, to do what they want to do, not necessarily go to college. Get them to support themselves.
- Even with day care and preschool, you need standards, scrutiny.

Labels and Language

There was no single phrase that inspired either group. Both groups expressed a certain amount of cynicism toward any label as being "just another label." The one word that drew the most positive responses was "learning," and people accepted it paired with "early" to some degree. Learning was interpreted broadly as going beyond formal or structured learning. There was one comment as to how meaningful the word "early" really was, comparing it to "pre-history" as another term that really means nothing.

Education prompted a range of responses. It was believed by these focus group participants to include everything from something that is structured and institutionally based to something that can "happen anywhere." There was little shared definition of the word in either group.

"Parents should scrutinize early childhood education the same as college."

Educare, Foundation Learning (Teacher, etc.), and Second Family all prompted mixed responses from both groups. Terms with the word "family" caused members of both groups to be concerned about how much they wanted a teacher to influence their child—they worried that calling them family may be going over that line. At the same time, they valued when a caregiver formed bonds with their child. Some were unsure what relationship Second Family had to learning of any sort. "Foundation" as a label brought out negative connotations from both groups.

The main message from these two focus groups was to keep the language simpl—don't try to create a new label. Tell people what you want them to know, then ask them what you want them to do in a very straightforward manner. Both groups were are wary of slick slogans.

Following are examples of responses from each of the focus groups on the specific terminology tested.

Educare

Caucasian Focus Group

- A gimmick.
- Just re-labeling to make it more glamorous.
- There are lots of names out there.

African-American Focus Group

- I like it—it has reference to day care and is concerned with how children are being cared for in terms of their education.
- Sounds like gobble-de-gook—means nothing.
- I like the educare concept in the pursuit of something better.
- I like early childhood education—it is simple, sums up everything a parent wants.

First Learning

Caucasian Focus Group

- How can you define that in terms of a child? As an adult, I learn things for the first time on a daily basis.
- Sounds like a brand name.

African-American Focus Group

- It's different and speaks to what parents do with kids.
- (Some negative head-nodding.)
- Sounds like it's in reference to day care for working parents. What I like about it is that it sounds like facility concerned with education as well as caring for children.
- I think the most exciting term is first learning—something magical, something new.
- My only concern is the concern over what we call it—if it is first learning or Timbuktu—what we call it doesn't matter. My own pet peeve is we spend more time and energy paying Ph.D. people and people with their masters to find new ways of learning. We have the three Rs, and they haven't changed in a bazillion years. Too much attention is being paid to doing it better or a new way. Just do it.

First Education
Caucasian Focus Group

- Education sounds more school-oriented.
- Learning is everything, not just the structured stuff.

African-American Focus Group

- First education. Sounds like going to kindergarten. You hope they make it there and beyond... Personally I prefer home schooling. Start at home. You can read to your kids just as good as a teacher can.

Early Education
Caucasian Focus Group

- Its positive...I think more of a parent reading to a child.
- Nursery school.
- A structured environment, planned things for children.
- Education starts at birth—this is sort of like saying "pre-history."
- Education at home rather than school.
- Structured and non.structured activities you can expose your kid to.

African-American Focus Group

- Starting out...just the start... simple, cut, and dry...that's what it is.
- I liked early education.
- My parents had 13 kids and my mother started out early with each, rather than wait till they got old.
- We were looking for a pre-school (for their child) because we did not want day care. We wanted our son to learn things. Most of the day cares we were investigating were just watching kids. I want to have control of my son's learning. They have to learn to learn at this age...structured. He doesn't need to practice playing, he already knows that.
- I had a day care and we sent them (the children) off to school knowing more than other kids in school. It was a schooling, but it wasn't what you'd call pre-school. We gave them the same lessons two-and three-ye..r-olds were doing—their ABCs.

Early Teacher
African-American Focus Group

- You are a teacher or you're not.
- Put a "sad face" by that one. (Shaking head in disapproval.)
- When both parents are working, we want something good about where they (the children) are at. Not something halfway there.
- Parents are the early teachers.
- Does that mean you arrive at school early...the first one there?
- I don't like the term early teacher.
- It threw me for a loop.

Development

African-American Focus Group

- I like that.
- Development and growing...that's where they are at that early age.
- Some of these words have a slightly negative connotation.
- Just splitting hairs, (all the terms) are closely related.

Foundation Learning

Caucasian Focus Group

- Something you should learn at home.

African-American Focus Group

- Sounds like you are raising money.
- Don't like "foundation."

Second Family

Caucasian Focus Group

- The teachers.
- It depends on the children. Some children have someone at school they look up to.
- Not sure about the term—the concept of day care providers being the second family is good...but it could be friends or other people you are close to.
- A second family could be a family outside of the regular family (like divorced parents in two households).

African-American Focus Group

- I like that...passing your children on if you are not with them. In the south, a teacher could get on your case anywhere (not just in school) because they were family.
- I don't like it. (3 respondents)

Family 2

African-American Focus Group

- What?
- I don't get a learning feeling...any relationship to early education.
- I don't want the providers to be that comfortable with me that I can't snap if something is not going right with my kid. Don't want them too lax.
- I want respect from the provider to my child and my family.
- I don't want the child so attached to the provider that they won't move on to school.

Conclusions

The two focus groups give some preliminary indications useful in mobilizing advocates for early childhood issues, but it must be taken into consideration that they represent a very limited sample. With this in mind, the one consistent message across both groups was the importance of parental responsibility in the education process. The buck stops

with the parent these participants assert, so we need to educate and support parents, on how to help their children's early development.

Focusing on the parental role in early childhood education appears to offer the strongest frame for building support, both in home and in provider situations. From there, one can build on ancillary aspects such as the teacher and parent as partner, especially when the importance of both roles is respected and the parent is placed as the one ultimately responsible.

Both groups appreciated and understood the role of early learning in a child's development and the contribution toward later formal schooling and overall success in the community. Neither group expressed concern about "too much" learning. Quality was acknowledged by all. Both groups expressed concern that not all parents understood this, suggesting the need for more general awareness of the issue (complementary to parent education).

Developing consensus on quality assurance and financial support is less clear and may require targeting of messages to specific subgroups. The group differed on the degree that the community was responsible for or willing to contribute to that educational success, with a number of the Caucasian group putting the larger burden on parents. While some were clearly willing to share the costs, most were skeptical that society would take on this responsibility and pessimistic that taxpayers would support new initiatives when current K-12 needs are not being met and bond issues repeatedly fail. The African-American group was concerned about costs to individuals and the kids who might really need to be served.

Terminology was not a motivating factor for either group, with somewhat negative feelings about the use of slogans such as "foundation learning" or "educare." Early learning had the broadest acceptance, while the other terms had enthusiasts and detractors. There was sufficient distrust about "fancy labels" that the project should consider not trying to coin a new phrase that diverges too far from the original "early childhood education" or "early learning." Stick to the basic information you want to provide and action you wish
to stimulate.

It was interesting that after both sessions, members of the groups approached the facilitator and said that they had "learned a lot tonight" and suggested that it might be good if people had the chance to come together and discuss issues as a community or neighborhood. This might be an opportunity for future community mobilization efforts.

APPENDIX – FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

When participant left a blank it is reflected by a blank in the listing

Seattle ECE #1 African-American Group – 3/16/98

Gender	Age	Number of Children	Adults in Household	Marital Status	Religion
F	59	0	1	Single	Baptist
F	21	1	1	Single	Baptist
M	42	0	4	Single	None
F	68	0	2	Widow	Christian
M	35	1	2	Married	Baptist
F	30	1	2	Married	Baptist
M	36	0	2	Single	
M	42	1	2	Divorced	Christian
F	44	0	1	Single	Catholic
M	35	1	2	Single	None
F	24	0	2	Single	Baptist
F	47	2	1		Catholic
F	72	4	2	Married	Methodist
F	36	2	1	Single	Baptist

South King County/Kent ECE #2 - Caucasian – 3/19/98

M	29	0	2	Single	
F	28	0	2	Single	
M	60+	2	1	Widower	
F	31	2	2	Married	Methodist
M	35	2	2	Married	Methodist
M	58	1	2	Married	Catholic
F	54	1	2	Married	Catholic
M	55	2	2	Married	
F	54	2	2	Married	Catholic
F	55	2	1	Divorced	Presbyterian
F	44	2	2	Married	Christian

Political Affiliation	Education	Occupation	Household Income
None	Some college	Title officer	<$20K
	High school		<$20K
Democrat	Some college	Laborer	<$20K
Democrat	High school	Retired	$40-$60K
Independent	Some college	Banker	$60-$80K
	College	Retail manager	$60-$80K
Democrat	High school		$<20K
Democrat	Advanced degree	Musician/Producer	$40-$60K
Democrat	Advanced degree	Chemist	$20-$40K
	High school	Nursing assistant	$<20K
Democrat	Advanced degree	Recreation coordinator	$20-$40K
Independent	Advanced degree	Human resources management	$40-$60K
Democrat	High school	Retired	$20-$40K
	Some college	Teacher	$20-$40K
	College	Sales	$40-$80K
	Advance degree	Teacher	$40-$80K
	Advance degree		$40-$60K
Republican	College degree	Accounts payable	$60-$80K
Republican	Advance degree	Account executive	$60-$80K
Democrat	Some college	Research test mechanic	$20-$40K
Democrat	High school	Housewife/Day Care	$20-$40K
	College degree	Logistics analyst	
	Some college	Homemaker	
	College degree	Service representative	$20-$40K
	Some college	Medical records	$40-$60K

NOTES

BENTON